Notice of Preparation

US Army Corps of Engineers
Seattle District

Environmental and Cultural Resources Branch
P.O. Box 3755
Seattle, WA 98124-3755
ATTN: (EN-ER)

Public Notice Date: April 7, 2015
Expiration Date: April 21, 2015
Reference: EN-ER-15-06
Project Name: Timber Harvest at Southeast Bank of Lake Koocanusa

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Interested parties are hereby notified that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Seattle District (Corps) plans to prepare, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, an environmental assessment (EA) for a timber harvest along the southeast bank of Lake Koocanusa as part of the USFS East Reservoir Project.

AUTHORITY

US Forest Service (USFS) has given the Corps authorization to harvest trees in Unit 16 near the dispersed campground adjacent to Warland-Five Mile Road west of the Highway 37 intersection along the left bank of Lake Koocanusa as part of the USFS East Reservoir Project (Figures 1 and 2).

The USFS East Reservoir Project includes land management activities such as timber harvest, fuel reduction in areas adjacent to private property, wildlife habitat enhancement, road storage and decommissioning, commercial thinning and precommercial thinning within the East Reservoir Project Area. USFS evaluated impacts per the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) entitled *East Reservoir Project Final Environmental Impact Statement* which was completed with a Record of Decision signed in October 2014. With the implementation of the East Reservoir Project, the USFS will be performing tree harvesting activities such as regeneration harvest treatment throughout the East Reservoir project area including Unit 16 near the dispersed campground adjacent to Warland-Five Mile Road west of the Highway 37 intersection along the southeast bank of Lake Koocanusa.

PROPOSED ACTION

The East Reservoir Project proposes several timber harvests. For Unit 16, the regeneration harvest is proposed. This harvest is intended to replace a forest stand when modification treatments (i.e. intermediate harvest) are not feasible due to poor quality trees for retention; stand is under stocked due past insect and disease mortality; or incorrect overstory species that would not meet management objectives. Specifically, regeneration harvest is needed to restore western larch, ponderosa pine and western white pine. Within proposed harvest units, there would be both live and dead trees that are designated for reserve. The specific method for Unit 16 is irregular shelterwood seed cut with reserves. With this method, an average of 15-25 overstory trees per acre would be left to shelter the developing stand from the elements, and provide large tree structural attributes in an irregular pattern to manage for visual concerns.

Tree harvesting activities could include use of heavy equipment such as excavator, installation and removal of temporary roads. No harvest activities are proposed in riparian areas or wetlands. The Corps is proposing to harvest trees in Unit 16 consistent with the method, irregular shelterwood seed cut with reserves as proposed in the USFS' East Reservoir Project. The harvested trees will be used in ecosystem restoration projects.

ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

Environmental impacts of the tree harvest activities including those in Unit 16 as part of the East Reservoir Project include impacts to vegetation resources, soils, water quality, fish and wildlife, air quality, and transportation as discussed in the enclosed Final EIS in Chapter 3 and summarized below.

a. Vegetation Resources. The proposed harvest method in Unit 16 effectively addresses ecosystem restoration and resilience because it treats and trends the greatest number of acres toward the desired condition. Hence, the action would have a minimal impact to vegetation.

b. Soil. Direct impacts on soils from harvest activities could include compaction, rutting and displacement. Typically, these impacts take place as a result of vehicles/equipment traversing areas within proposed units such as skid trails, landings and temporary roads. Indirect impacts from harvesting activities could include erosion from surface water runoff channeled into ruts, fire lines, and/or along temporary roads within units. With less vegetation a conversion from a drier soil environment to a slightly moister site would occur. Less vegetation would mean a thinner canopy and more soil interception from rainfall above. These impacts are anticipated to be minimized by implementing best management practices (BMPs) such as scarification.

c. Water Quality. Activities such as timber harvest, skid trail construction and temporary road construction would affect water quality by exposing soil, contributing to overland flow, and reducing infiltration. The proposed construction of temporary roads including haul routes to accommodate timber harvest would result in a short-term impact on water resources due to the alteration of overland drainage patterns, interception and alteration of groundwater flow, and increased soil erosion. Temporary roads would be designed to minimize the potential impacts to water resources. In addition, the implementation of BMPs is anticipated to minimize the impact to hydrologic recovery and the amount of sediment generated. The action that the Corps would be undertaking is not near a stream or the reservoir, and impacts on water resources would be minimal. The East Reservoir Project including harvest activities is expected to maintain beneficial uses and water quality at current levels or improve them via riparian buffer guidelines and implementation of BMPs.

d. Fish and Wildlife. For the Corps' action, impacts to fish would be negligible due to the distance from the lake and any other body of water. In addition, this action would include the implementation of BMPs to further any chance of impacts.

In the short-term, harvest treatments such as proposed at Unit 16 would alter habitat for various wildlife species including neotropical migratory birds, changing stand structure and composition. Some species would benefit from this alteration while others would not. Some impacts may only be short-term. Overall, the long-term sustainability of the habitat would be increased as stand density and fuels concerns are addressed by this project and historic fire regimes are returned.

As required by the Endangered Species Act, the USFS biological assessment concluded that the East Reservoir Project will have no effect on water howellia, Spalding's catchfly, bull trout or white sturgeon. Through consultation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred that the

project may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the grizzly bear, Canada lynx or designated critical lynx. Concurrence was received on August 8, 2013.

e. Air Quality. Effects from the Corps' tree harvesting and hauling activities to air quality would be minimal and short term, and are a small portion of the overall harvesting proposed in the USFS project. These effects would only occur during harvesting and hauling activities.

f. Transportation. The Final EIS for the East Reservoir Project concluded that no measurable increase in long-term negative effects would result from the implementation of any proposed road management activities. It is, however, recognized that most road management activities that provide long-term benefits also create some minor and acceptable short-term negative effects. For the Corps' action, the effect on local traffic would be minimal since this timber harvest represents a very small portion of the overall timber harvest proposed by the USFS.

e. Cultural Resources. All areas proposed for ground-disturbing activities including Unit 16 have been inventoried prior to the implementation of any activity that has the potential to impact cultural resource sites. No cultural resources are expected to be affected by this action.

EVALUATION

The Corps has made a preliminary determination that the environmental impacts of the proposal can be adequately evaluated under the National Environmental Policy Act through preparation of an environmental assessment (EA). Preparation of an EA addressing potential environmental impacts associated with the levee rehabilitation project is currently underway.

The Corps invites submission of factual comment on the environmental impact of the proposal. The Corps will consider all submissions received before the expiration date of this notice. The nature or scope of the proposal may be changed upon consideration of the comments received. The Corps will initiate an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and afford all the appropriate public participation opportunities attendant to an EIS, if significant effects on the quality of the human environment are identified and cannot be mitigated.

Submit comments to this office, Attn: Environmental and Cultural Resources Branch, no later than *April 21, 2015 t*o ensure consideration. In addition to sending comments via mail, comments may be e-mailed to hannah.f.hadley@usace.army.mil. Notice of Preparation can be found at the following website: http://www.nws.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/EnvironmentalDocuments/2015EnvironmentalDocuments.aspx under "Timber Harvest at Southeast Bank of Lake Koocanusa". Requests for additional information should be directed to Hannah Hadley at 206-764-6950 or the above e-mail address.

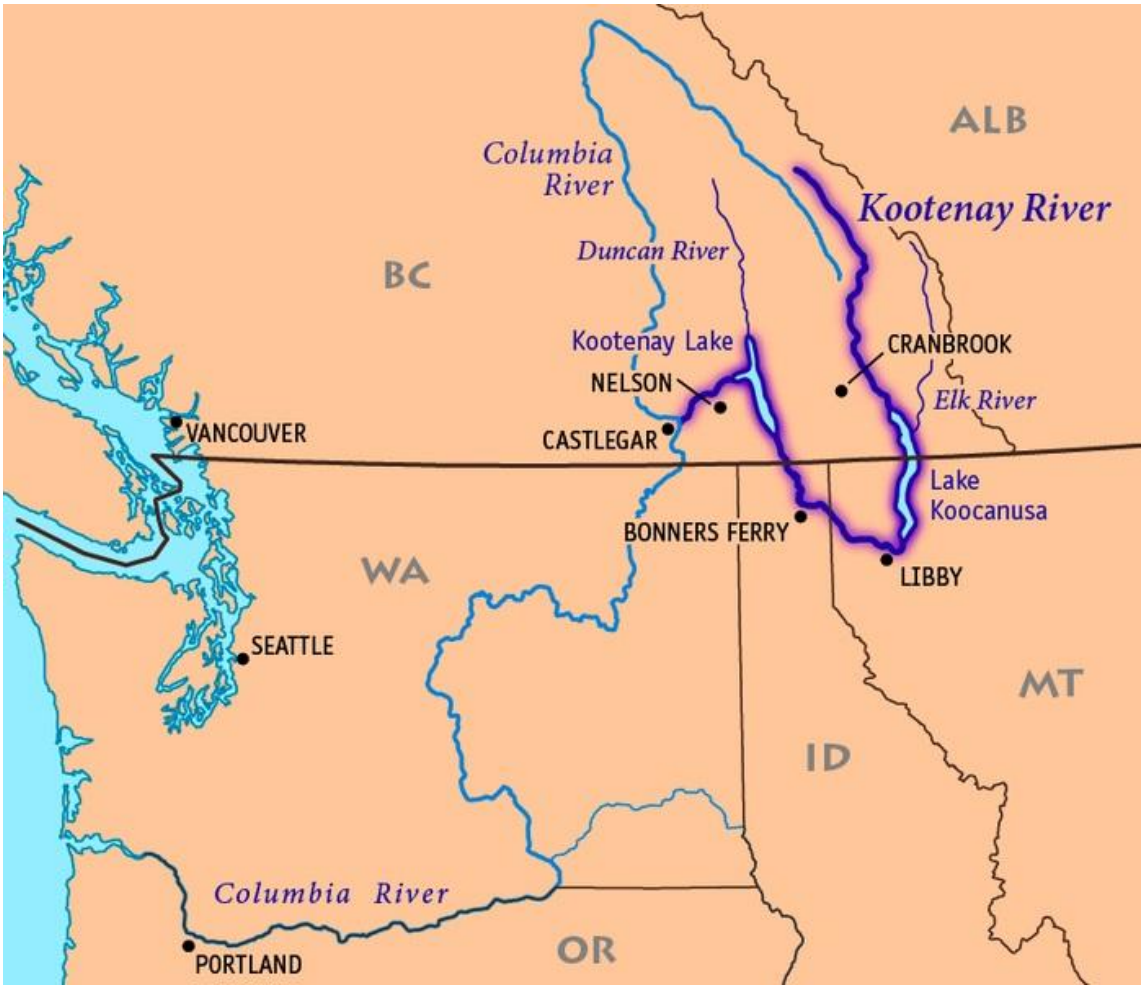

Figure 1: *Vicinity Map*

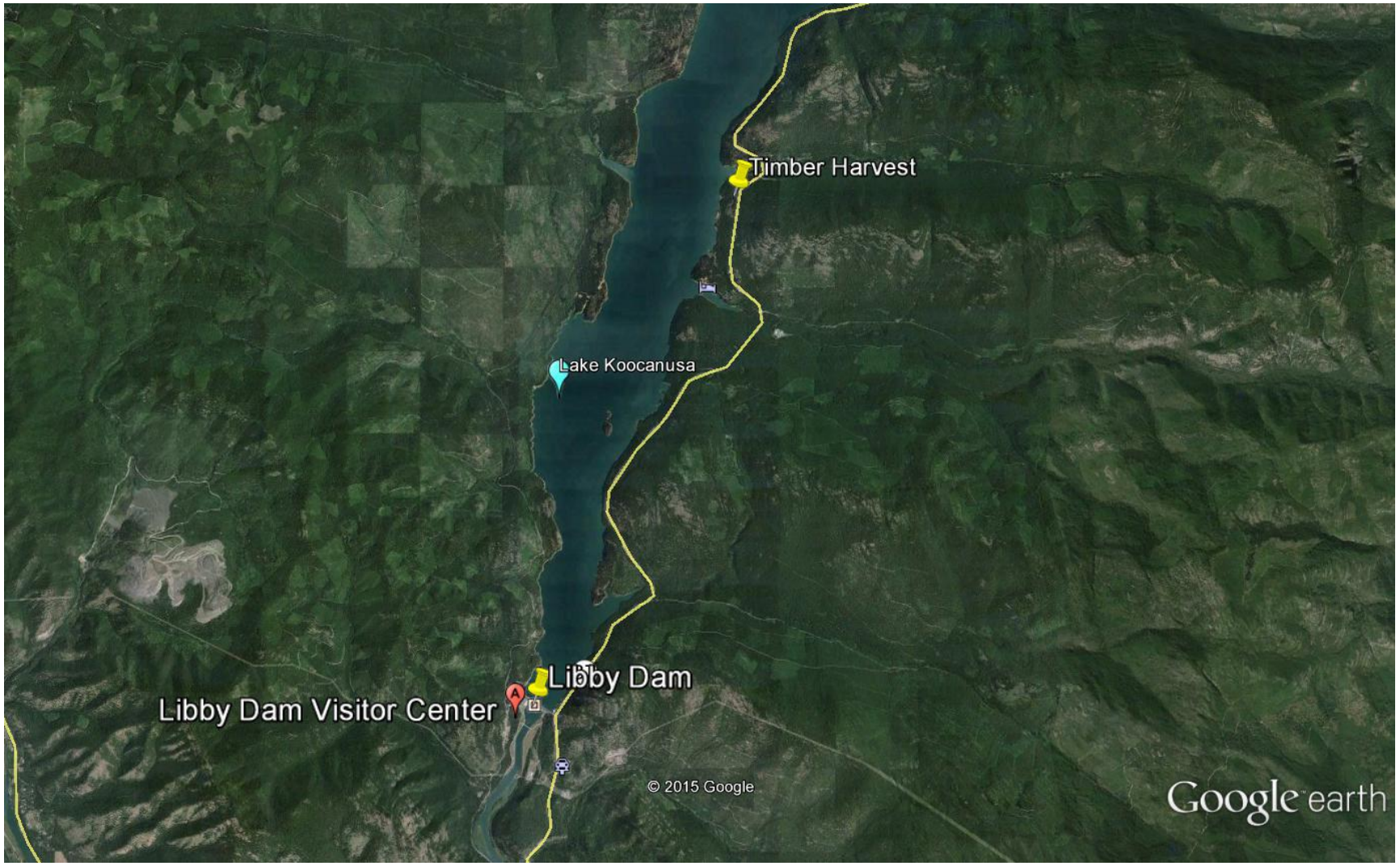

Figure 2: Location of Timber Harvest